Notetaking/Summarizing Strategies

One strategy for improving reading comprehension is to write summaries. Summaries function to reduce the amount of information to be remembered and to organize the information in a way that aids understanding and remembering. Four rules of summary writing (REFERENCE) are as follows.

* Collapse lists.
  + If you see a list of things, try to think of a word or phrase as a name for the whole list.
  + For example, if you saw a list like eyes, ears, neck, arms and legs, you could substitute 'body parts.' Or if you saw a list like ice skating, skiing and sledding, you could use 'winter sports.'
  + In short, substitute a superordinate for a list of items or actions.
* Use topic sentences.
  + Often authors write a sentence that summarizes a whole paragraph. It is called a topic sentence or a main idea.
  + If the author gives you one, you can use it in your summary.
  + Some paragraphs do not have explicit topic sentences or main ideas. You may have to invent one for your summary.
* Get rid of unnecessary detail.
  + Some text information can be repeated in a passage. The same thing can be said in a number of different ways, all in the same passage.
  + Other text information can be unimportant or trivial.
  + Since summaries are meant to be short, you should delete trivia and redundancies.
* Collapse paragraphs.
  + Paragraphs are often related to one another.
  + Some paragraphs explain one or more other paragraphs. Other paragraphs just expand on information presented in previous paragraphs. Some are more necessary or important than others.
  + Decide which paragraphs should be kept, which can be deleted and which can be joined with others.

Five steps of summary writing (REFERENCE) are provided below.

1. Make sure you understand the text.
   * Ask yourself, 'What was this text about?' and 'What did the author say?'
   * Try to say the general theme to yourself before you begin to summarize the text.
2. Look back.
   * Reread the text to make sure you got the general theme right.
   * Also reread to make certain that you really understand what the important parts of the text are.
   * Star or mark the important parts of the text.
   * Now use the four specific rules for writing a summary.
3. Rethink.
   * Reread a paragraph of the text.
   * Try to say the theme of that paragraph to yourself.
   * Is the theme a topic sentence? (Main idea?) Have you marked it?
   * Or is the topic sentence missing? If it is missing, have you written one, in the margin, for example?
4. Check and double check.
   * Did you leave in any lists? Make sure you don't list things out in your summary.
   * Did you repeat yourself? Make sure you didn't.
   * Did you skip anything?
   * Is all the important information in the summary?
5. Polish the summary.
   * When a lot of information is reduced from an original passage, the resulting concentrated information often sounds very unnatural. Fix this problem and create a more natural- sounding summary.
   * Adjustments may include but are not limited to: paraphrasing, insertion of connecting words like 'and' or 'because,' and the insertion of introductory or closing statements.
   * Paraphrasing is especially useful here, for two reasons: It improves your ability to remember the material and it avoids using the author's words, otherwise known as plagiarism [[Paraphrasing](http://www.muskingum.edu/%7Ecal/database/general/writing.html#Citing) and [plagiarism](http://www.muskingum.edu/%7Ecal/database/general/writing.html#Plagiarism) are discussed in detail in the Writing and Proofing page of the General-Purpose Learning Strategies main stack].